

PEONIES ARE EASY to grow, look great in perennial borders, and produce outstanding cut flowers. What more could you want from a plant?

dividing

Peonies are among the longest-lived perennials, often thriving for decades, even when neglected. This makes them great heirloom plants—easy to divide, easy to share. It's best to divide peonies in the fall—after the heat of summer but with enough time to settle in before winter. Be sure each division has a few “eyes” or growing points. Learn more about dividing peonies: BHG.com/DividePeony

cut flowers

HARVESTING BLOOMS Cut flower stems when buds show just a touch of color. If ants are present, leave the stems outside for a few hours to give the ants a chance to crawl away, then bring the stems inside.

TIMING THE SHOW Peony buds stay closed while refrigerated but open rapidly when placed in warm water, making it easy to time the blossoms for a showy bouquet. Place buds in the refrigerator, putting the stems in water or wrapping them in plastic. When you're ready to display, cut the stem ends and place in lukewarm water, and the buds will open within a day.

CHOOSING VARIETIES Pick peony cultivars according to the appearance you like and by bloom time. Growing several varieties that include early, mid-, and late bloomers ensures a continuous supply of flowers for six or more weeks.



CORAL CHARM



common concerns

FLOPPY FLOWERS Peony stems, especially older types, might flop over with the weight of blooms. To prevent this, place a peony ring, *above left*, over the plant as it emerges in spring. The stems will grow through the support and stay upright.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE ANTS? A common sight on peony buds, *above right*, ants do no harm. They are simply sipping a bit of sap.

growing peonies

Popular in Victorian times, peonies have an old-fashioned reputation. But their tough, easy-care nature makes them perfect for today's low-input gardens.

PLANTING Typically, growers sell and ship peonies bareroot in fall, which is the preferred planting time. However, container-grown peonies can be planted in spring.

HARDINESS Most peonies are hardy in Zones 3–8. In Zones 9 and 10, they often don't receive enough winter chilling to bloom.

SUN Peonies perform best in full sun.

SOIL AND WATER Moist, well-drained soil is best, but once established, peonies are quite drought-tolerant. An annual application of fertilizer helps plants thrive and bloom well.

DISEASES To avoid foliar diseases that appear in damp conditions, maintain good air circulation and ample spacing between plants. In fall, cut off and destroy foliage to reduce diseases that overwinter on the stems and leaves.

ANIMAL PESTS Deer have been known to consume peonies when desperate for food, but they do not appear to be a favorite selection. Thus, peonies are usually a good choice for gardens frequented by the hungry browsers.

DEADHEADING It does no harm to leave seed heads on the plant, but for a tidier appearance cut off spent blooms.